

MAY 21, 1966

New Country Town

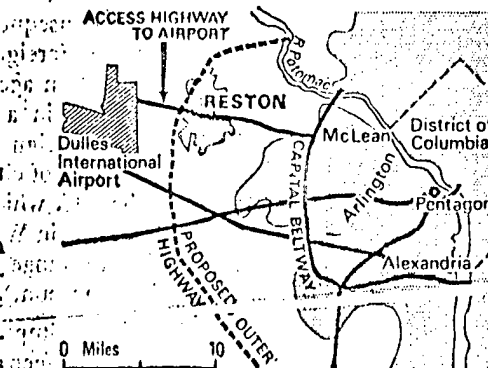
FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT RECENTLY IN RESTON

On a sunny Sunday in spring to stroll on to the plaza at Lake Anne Village in Reston, Virginia, is like stepping on to the stage of a musical comedy—a very “with-it” production on which no expense has been spared. The set is a J-shaped piazza, rather rugged in style, studded with fountains and witty wooden sculptures, bordered by boutiques bearing huge insignia of their trades; the giant toothbrush among the pills on the wall of the drug store is clogged by a real bird's nest. Over the shops are flats and maisonettes with balconies on which a chorus of FFR's—First Families of Reston—might emerge at any moment.

They would look out over an artificial lake, edged with trees, lawns and terraces of “town houses” or “garden apartments” two or three stories high. Some have boats moored underneath to carry their residents to market but the cars are all concealed from view. Restonians pride themselves on having domesticated the automobile and on using their feet for local journeys. The focus of the scene is a fifteen-storey “high rise,” a block of flats, the modern town-planner's substitute for the campanile of a medieval Italian town.

Lake Anne is a pilot project, the first of seven villages—each to have 10,000 inhabitants, enough to make a supermarket profitable—which will be scattered over 10½ square miles of rolling, wooded countryside. So far on a Sunday there are more visitors than residents and those who come to stare have been rather slow about deciding to stay. This explains why this weekend the Lake Anne Village Centre, opened only last December with a “Salute to the Arts,” is to be the scene of yet another ceremony, marking the fact that “America is joining the international new town movement.” For this is the first big housing development in the United States to be planned around jobs as well as homes and recreation—although others are on the way.

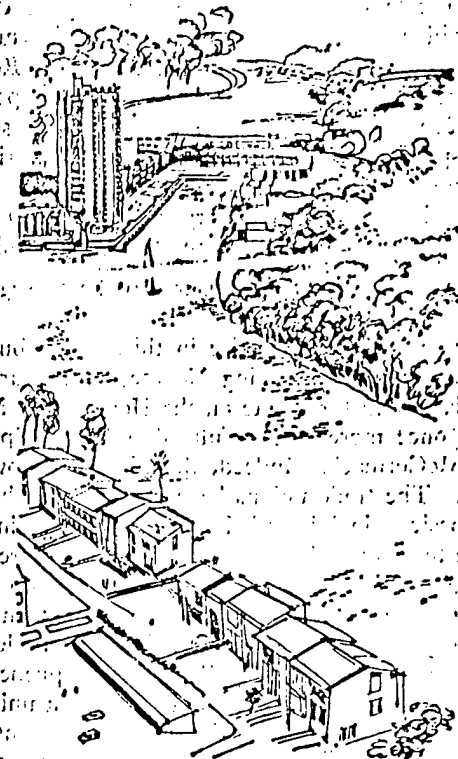
As yet there are not enough jobs but both the industrial park and the Group



Facilities Complex for small undertakings are bringing in electronics firms and research companies—the “think” industries that are growing so fast in America today. They welcome Reston's good living conditions for their staff and good transport facilities for their products; these would be even better if the access highway to Dulles Airport had access roads itself. Meanwhile a high proportion of the residents work eighteen miles away in Washington, or in its Virginia suburbs—for the Department of Defence at the Pentagon, perhaps, or for the Central Intelligence Agency at McLean.

This means that they come from a rather narrow group of middle-class, middle-income, intellectuals who self-consciously enjoy the idea that they are “creating a community.” This tendency is accentuated by the fairly heavy cost of the various types of houses, ranging from \$25,000 to \$45,000, and flats, which rent at from \$125 to over \$200 a month. Cheaper construction is coming but there are those who think that a pattern has already been set which it will be hard to break. There is, however, more diversity in age groups than might be expected. Reston appeals to middle-aged couples whose children have grown up as well as to the young and special housing projects for the old are being planned. After all, with its emphasis on “leisure activities”—golf, tennis, swimming, fishing, riding, culture, clubs—Reston offers many of the attractions of America's famous retirement centres.

The mix of varying types of dwellings, only made possible through the willingness of the local authorities of Fairfax County to change their zoning regulations, is part of the charm of Lake Anne Village. Its various “clusters” are compact groups, each with a different character—a result of having a different archi-



tect, all so far stylishly smart. Reston has not, however, escaped entirely from the usual American suburban sprawl of “dream houses.” The flats and terraces have been built by the corporation which owns the whole estate and are available only on strict conditions. But farther from the village centre land has been sold to private individuals and developers who may build almost as they choose; unfortunately they have chosen both miniature Mount Vernons and western ranch houses. This is where it is possible to wish that Reston, Inc., had been more rather than less paternalistic.

The impresario of the whole production is Mr R. E. Simon; Reston is named from his initials. Five years ago he found himself with money, ideals and imagination to spare. He also found a large undeveloped tract of rural land, all under a single ownership, for sale in a district with a co-operative local government. Finally he, and the Gulf Oil Corporation and the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company which put up a good share of the capital between them, had time to wait for profits on the \$1 billion which the whole privately-sponsored and lavishly-financed project is expected to cost before it is completed in 1980.